introduction of machine writing of passports, introduction of the tele-enquiry system, launch of the Central Passport Organisation (CPO) web-site and also at selected passport offices, scanning of Index Cards etc. Machine readable passport booklets have been introduced with new security features making them tamper proof. A system of on-line transmission of Police reports has also been introduced in the Passport Offices of Bangalore, Mumbai and Chennai and this is proposed to be extended to other passport offices in a phased manner.

Settlement of Indians in Nepal

2654. SHRI RAMDAS AGARWAL: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the former Nepalese Prime Minister, Girija Prasad Koirala, during his visit to India in last July had assured the Indian Government of his positive interest in permanently settling the country's Indian-origin population there;

(b) whether the Indian population devoid of citizenship rights, feels discriminated against in employment, land ownership and admission of children in State-run-schools;

(c) whether the Nepal SC's Judgement also denied citizenship rights to over 3,00,000 ethnic Indians recently as reported in The Hindustan Times, dated 31st July 2001; and

(d) if so, what remedial action Government propose to take in the matter?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH): (a) and (b) No, Sir. No such assurance was given by the Nepalese Prime Minister Mr. Girija Prasad Koirala during his visit to India during July/August last year in regard to Indian origin population in Nepal.

A number of people of Indian origin are settled in the terai region in Nepal. Some of them have been living there for generations. Many of them do not possess Nepali Citizenship Certificate as a result of which they do not enjoy facilities like land ownership, employment etc. in Nepal. There are, however, no reports of discrimination in regard to admission of their children in state run schools.

(c) and (d) On July 23, 2001, the Hon. Supreme Court of Nepal declared 30,000 (not 300,000 as reported by the Hindustan Times) of the 34,090 citizenship certificates issued under the aegis of a one man Commission appointed in 1997 by the then Government of Nepal as invalid. These citizenship certificates issued to applicants in 20 Districts of the Nepal terai belt were declared null and void on grounds of procedural deficiencies. Mr. Khum Bahadur Khadka, Home Minister of his Majesty's Government of Nepal, has informed the House of Representatives on August 05, 2001 that the Government would follow the right procedures and provide the certificates, within

one month, to all those people whose citizenship papers were revoked by the Supreme Court citing procedural mistakes while issuing them. The problem of state-less terai Nepalese is a complex and sensitive issue in Nepal and has remained unresolved for a long time. An attempt to get an amendment incorporated into the Nepal Citizenship Act of 1964 through a Finance Bill earlier this year by the Government of former Prime Minister G P Koirala also failed as the Supreme Court declared it to be unconstitutional. Some political parties of Nepal have been advocating that it can be resolved only through an amendment to the Constitution which can be achieved only through discussions and political consensus within Nepal.

Neighbourly relations with China

2655. SHRIMATI SARLA MAHESHWARI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government propose to improve good neighbourly relations with China; and

(b) if so, what are the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH): (a) and (b) Government of India is committed to the development of friendly and good neighbourly relations with China on the basis of the principles of Panchsheel and mutual sensitivity to each others concerns. This has been underscored during recent high level political exchanges between India and China, including during the visit of senior Chinese leader and NPC Chairman Mr. Li Peng in January 2001 and the visit of Deputy Chairperson of the Rajya Sabha, Smt. Najma Heptulla to China in July 2001.

India and China seek a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable settlement of the boundary question through peaceful consultations. We have signed an agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas in 1993 and a second agreement on Confidence Building Measures in the Military Field along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas in 1996. These two Agreements provide an institutional framework for the maintenance of peace and tranquility in the border areas. Both sides have also agreed to expedite the process of LAC clarification within existing mechanisms. The two sides have exchanged maps depicting the Line of Actual Control (LAC) as perceived by the two sides respectively in the Middle Sector of the India-China boundary. [Note: The maps of the LAC in the Middle Sector were exchanged in Beijing in November 2000 at the 8th Meeting of the Expert Group.] Both sides have reaffirmed their intention to proceed with the process of clarification and confirmation of the LAC on the basis of the 1993 Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace & Tranquility along the LAC in the India-China Border Areas.